

Imation recovers bank account numbers from used data devices that GAO deemed “a low security risk”

Washington, D.C. – Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04), has sent a letter to the Government Accountability Office asking that it reopen its investigation of the privacy and national security risks posed by government agencies reselling used magnetic data tapes that may once have contained large amounts of sensitive personal and government information.

Researchers working for Imation, an Oakdale, MN-based corporation that produces magnetic data tapes, were able to recover a wide range of sensitive information from used data tapes that were supposedly wiped clean before being re-sold.

Using readily available equipment and information, Imation investigators found out where the tapes originated and recovered bank account numbers, expense reports, employee tax and benefit information, and other sensitive data.

“If federal agencies are selling used magnetic storage tapes on the open market with this level of recoverable sensitive data available to anyone with minimum technical skills or equipment,” McCollum wrote to the GAO, “we should all be alarmed and demanding greater accountability from federal agencies engaged in such sales.”

An initial GAO investigation – less thorough than the one conducted by Imation – failed to recover any sensitive data from used tapes. In light of Imation’s findings, however, Rep. McCollum is strongly urging the GAO to initiate a broader investigation to ensure that government agencies including the Federal Reserve and U.S. Air Force are not reselling used data tapes from which personal or national security-related information could be recovered.

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